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Why is the government in the business of telling us what television we can use?

Just six months until all television stations will broadcast only a digital signal. It means older analog televisions that don't have cable or converter boxes will be obsolete.

"The spectrum that you get your TV signal is owned by the public through the government, and we license that," says U.S. Representative Lee Terry.

That's right: Uncle Sam technically owns the airwaves. Every television station is licensed to broadcast on a certain frequency. So why the mandated change from analog to digital? Terry says it's about efficiency.

"Digital uses much less space on the radio spectrum for TV," says Terry. "We can use the additional radio frequency for public safety."

Police, fire and paramedics will be able to use the newly created space for communications. There will also be space for new broadband wireless services.

"This is finally an example of government being more efficient with its resources, says Terry. "Now if we could only that that to our budget."

The U.S. is actually years behind many European countries when it comes to the digital transition. Terry says TV viewers will also benefit.

"The consumer gets a benefit of a very clear picture," says Terry. "Much clearer than the analog signal."

The transition still creates its share of confusion.

"We get a lot of calls from people that don't understand," says Terry.

Basically if you have an older TV that gets an analog over-the-air signal, you'll need a set top converter box. The government is offering coupons to help people buy those converters. But some are still unhappy about having to do so. Terry says it all comes down to ownership.

"The government does own that radio spectrum," says Terry. "We get to control who uses that spectrum."

If you have any questions or concerns you can call 211. The United Way is also working to help, especially seniors who need help hooking up the converter box.

